

April 25, 1996

6161 Dawlish Avenue  
Niagara Falls, ON L2G 4J5  
Wk: 641-2252 (ext. 7713)  
Hm: 356-9216

Editor  
The Niagara Falls Review  
4801 Valley Way  
Niagara Falls, ON L2E 6T6

Dear Editor,

The NSBE's decision to raise the 1996 mill rate by only 3.1 per cent (April 22) ensures that the provincial government's cuts will hurt classroom education. Teachers will be less able to help special needs students; all our children will sit in crowded classrooms. As someone who has worked in reading education all my adult life, and someone who sees all too frequently even some college students who read poorly, I say the Board is making a poor decision.

When I meet adults who are illiterate—and more that one-quarter of the adults in our community have great difficulty reading and writing—I often ask them, "When did you first notice that—for you—reading and writing were harder?" Every one has said, "I knew in first grade that I was in trouble."

For almost twenty years I have taught elementary school teachers how to improve the teaching of reading and writing. I have often asked grade one teachers, "When can you tell that a student is falling behind in learning to read and write?" These teachers almost always say that by Thanksgiving they can identify the children failing to learn.

Then I ask the teachers, "If you know who is in trouble so early, why can't you help them?"

"If I didn't have so many to teach, I could spend more time helping the ones learning more slowly," they say, "but I have to help them all the best I can."

The evidence is strong that small primary classes mean children learn faster. It showed in the four-year study in Tennessee (Project STAR). It is clear in David Berliner's new book *The Manufactured Crisis*.

Finance Committee Chair Don Reilly—whose pension from his years as an employee of the Board is probably larger than the family incomes of most Niagarans—is wrong: The Board should raise property taxes to avoid increasing class sizes and handicapping our children.

Yours truly,

Douglas B. Rogers, Ed.D.